

CODREANU AND THE IRON GUARD



"We shall create a spiritual atmosphere, a moral atmosphere, in which the heroic man may be born and on which he can thrive. This hero will lead our people on the road of its greatness."

- Corneliu Codreanu

In the pre-dawn hours of October 9, 1923, a half-dozen men sat on benches in a bare room at the police headquarters in Bucharest, Romania. The police had seized them several hours before. An informer in their midst had accused them of plotting to murder over twenty of Romania's leading citizens. Now they were to be questioned by police and government officials.

The leader of the alleged conspirators, Corneliu Codreanu, 24 years old, waited pensively as his comrades disappeared, one by one, into the interrogation room. He tried to devise tactics for parrying the questions to come. Then it was his turn.

The prosecutor ordered several incriminating letters and two baskets containing the group's firearms to be placed in front of Codreanu. "Are these your weapons?" he snarled.

Codreanu hesitated. He asked for a moment's reflection. It was a moment at the crossroads. The prosecutor and the police smirked derisively, waiting for the expected denials.

Then Codreanu spoke out: "Yes, these guns our ours. We wanted to use them to shoot the government ministers, the rabbis and the big Jewish bankers."

Codreanu reeled off the names of the Romanian politicians and Jews on his death list: Marzescu, Bercovici, the Blanks, Rosenthal, Fildermann, Honigmann, and the rest. His interrogators were stunned by the young man's boldness and resolve. The prosecutor, his smugness forgotten, gasped, "But why kill them?"

"The former because they betrayed our country," Codreanu shot back. "The latter as enemies and corrupters,"

"And you don't regret it now?"

"No, we regret nothing...Though we have fallen it does not matter:

behind us there are tens of thousands who think likewise!"

At dawn's first glow filtered in through the windows of the police station, Codreanu, shoulders squared and head held high, was led to a basement cell.

The die was cast. From then on in his struggle for his country's freedom Codreanu gave no thought to turning back.

Who was this remarkable young man, and what had driven him to such desperate measures? Corneliu Zelea Codreanu was born on September 13, 1899, in Hushi, a small town in the Romanian Province of Moldavia. His father, Ion Zelea Codreanu, the descendant of several generations of foresters, was a secondary school teacher and an ardent nationalist; his mother, Elise Brauner Codeanu, was the granddaughter of a Bavarian immigrant.

Between the ages of eleven and sixteen Codreanu attended the famous military school at Manastirea Dealului, the Cloister on the Hill. There he learned the soldierly virtues of courage, discipline, and taciturnity. Codreanu's inborn talents for leadership and organizing were reinforced and developed at the academy, and he acquired a taste for hard work and self-denial. At the Cloister, as he later wrote, he "learned to love the trench and to despise the drawing room."

When Romania declared war on Austria-Hungary in August 1916, Codreanu, not old enough to enlist, left home and joined his father at the front, where the elder Codreanu commanded an infantry company. Codreanu took part in the advance and subsequent retreat across the rugged terrain of Transylvania, until his father ordered him to return home. When the First World War ended in 1918, Codreanu was an officer cadet at an infantry training camp.

When Codreanu arrived at Jassy, however, he found the city and its university wracked by strikes and demonstrations. The workers, chafing under miserable working conditions and meagre wages,

had succumbed to the wiles of Communist agitators, who filled their heads with visions of the promised land being built across the border in Russia. At the university many students and professors were outspoken Marxists, and they had little difficulty in intimidating their nationalist colleagues.

At fact value, the situation in Jassy was incomprehensible, especially to a young patriot like Codreanu. The unification of all Romanians in a single Great Romania after the First World War was the fulfillment of centuries-old nationalist longings. Nevertheless, the urban intelligensia and the workers ceaselessly reviled Romania's King Ferdinand, the Church, and the army.

It didn't take long for Codreanu to identify the driving force behind the anti-national activities of the workers and the intellectuals. Both factions were propagandized, agitated and controlled almost entirely by members of an alien group hostile to Romania's heritage and soil: the Jews.

In 1919 the so-called "workers' movement" in Jassy was lead by a Dr. Ghelerter, who had as his lieutenants Messrs. Gheler, Spiegler, and Schreiber. Their superiors in Bucharest, the Romanian capital, were Ana Pauker and Ilie Moscovici. All of them, like the great majority of the communist leaders in Romania, were Jews.

The Jewish revolutionaries in Romania derived moral sustenance from the successes of their kinsmen in Russia, where Jews made up the majority of Bolshevik leaders and cadres. Equally inspirational had been the short, blood-drenched regime of Bela Kun (born Cohn) and his Jewish commissars in Hungary, which had been smashed by the intervention of the Romanian Army only months before.

Codreanu was undaunted by the swaggering, arrogant leftists and their Jewish wirepullers. He set to work to smash Judeo-Marxism in Jassy with the same reckless courage he had shown for the front three years before.

Disgusted by the apathy and cowardice of the university's conservative students, Codreanu joined a small group called the Guard of National Conscience, which had been founded and was led by Constantin Pancu, a burly steelworker. The Guard numbered among its members Romanians from all classes, pledged to build a strong Romania based on a just social order and purged of racial aliens.

Codreanu quickly became the dominant figure in the Guard of National Conscience. Through ceaseless and heroic activism he made the small movement a force to be reckoned with in the streets and factories of Jassy.

At the Agency of State Monopolies and the Nicolina railway works Codreanu and a handful of followers defied thousands of striking workers to haul down the red flag and raise the Romanian tricolor above the factories. Codreanu's bravery and determination won him the grudging respect of the Romanian workers and the bitter hatred of their Jewish manipulators.

Codreanu and the men of the Guard of National Conscience were far from reactionaries anxious to shore up the existing social order. The Guard's program called for "Christian-national socialism," and it was Codreanu's avowed aim to free the workers from the Jewish-Bolshevist influences and then to develop a strong sense of national identity in them. As Codreanu said, "It is not enough to defeat communism. We must fight for the rights of the workers. They have a right to bread and honour. We must fight against the oligarchic parties, creating national workers' organizations which can gain their rights within the framework of the state and not against the state."

After the Romanian government mustered the will to crush the communist-directed strikes and demonstrations, Codreanu and his student supporters turned their attention to the university. In 1920 the Romanian universities, and especially Jassy, swarmed with

Jewish aliens. Although the Jews in Romania constituted only five per cent of the population, over a third of Jassy's students were Jews, and Jewish students carried on a ceaseless agitation against everything Romanian.

Codreanu and his comrades put an end to the Jewish terror on the campus in short order. The Red toughs who had hazed and bullied the nationalist students now found themselves on the defensive.

The fashion in Russian caps, worn as a sign of sympathy for the Bolsheviks, became passe after Codreanu and his friends began thrashing students so attired and then burning their revolutionary headgear.

A student strike led by the Jew Speigler was foiled when Codreanu's group seized the dining hall and barred the striking students on the grounds that "he who doesn't work, doesn't eat."

When the Jewish-owned newspapers in Jassy, *Opinia* and *Lumea*, attacked King Ferdinand and insulted Codreanu, the young nationalist led a raiding party to the newspaper offices, where he and his followers wrecked the presses.

By 1922, when Codreanu was graduated from the university's Faculty of Law, he had almost single-handedly converted the University of Jassy into a bastion of nationalist sentiment. Furthermore, Codreanu's supporters were disseminating pro-Romanian and anti-Jewish ideas at schools and universities across the country.

Codreanu elected to continue his studies in political economy. In the fall of 1922 he traveled to Germany and registered at the University of Berlin. In Berlin he made contact with German nationalists, and it was in those days that he first heard of Adolf Hitler, whom he came to esteem as a fellow nationalist and the savior of his people.

Codreanu's studies in Germany were terminated suddenly. On December 10, 1922, the Romanian university students went on strike, demanding not only improved food and decent living conditions, but also a limitation on the number of Jews admitted to the universities.

Codreanu hurried back to make common cause with the striking students. The strike dragged on for months, despite the liberal use of police and regular troops by the government.

During the strike Codreanu became convinced that the time was ripe for the creation of a nationalist movement which would appeal to Romanians of every station in life, rather than limiting itself to students. Together with professor A.C. Cuza of the University of Jassy, Codreanu founded the League of Christian National Defense on March 3, 1923.

Scarcely three weeks after the Romanian National Assembly underscored the need for a nationalist, anti-Jewish fighting movement by amending the Romanian constitution to allow nearly every Jew in the country to become a citizen. When Codreanu heard the news he burst out crying. National-minded Romanians were stunned.

There was a simple reason for the outrage at the assembly's high-handed action. The Jews of Romania were demonstrably an alien body in the national organism. They differed from Romanians in language, dress, customs, religion, race and spirit. Nor were they ready to change their ways: it was the Romanians who would have to change in order to accommodate them.

The Jews of Romania were not content to subvert the country through Marxism. Since the early 19th century they had largely controlled Romanian finance, commerce and industry. As the historian Abraham Leon Sachar put it, with characteristic Jewish arrogance, "Anti-Semitism needed no external stimulation in bigoted little Romania... The Jews formed the only middle class,

practically the only intelligent class, and the commerce of the country usually passed through their hands. They were bitterly hated by the Romanian peasantry."

After Romania won its freedom from the Ottoman Empire in 1879, Romanian statesmen and intellectuals had attempted to deny the Jews living there citizenship under any circumstances. Pressure from the European powers, always eager to appease their Jewish financiers, forced the Romanian government to recognize the theoretical right of Jews to citizenship. Since qualification depended on either service in the Romanian armed forces or a certification of the applicant's high moral character, however, few Jews became citizens.

Nevertheless, Jewish economic control increased steadily. During the years in which Codreanu sought to combat their influence, the Jews of Romania owned most of the country's banks and newspapers. The liberal historian Eugen Weber has noted that in this period 80 per cent of bank employees and 70 per cent of the journalists were Jews, as were 139 out of the 142 members of the Bucharest stock exchange.

Their hold on the Romanian economy enabled the Jews to exercise a corresponding control over the country's political system. The larger parties-the Liberals, the Peasant Party, and the agrarian party headed by the war hero General Averescu-could all be relied on to uphold Jewish interests. These parties became so deformed by their servility to the Jews that it was impossible to distinguish among them. As Codreanu wrote, "Fundamentally there was no distinction among them other than differences of form and personal interests-the same thing in different shapes. They did not even have the justification of differing opinions. Their only real motivation was the religion of personal interest."

Despite the exertions of Codreanu and his followers, the student strike failed. In the fall of 1923, the Romanian students returned to school. They had won a few material improvements, but the

government would make no concessions toward limiting the number of Jews flooding into the universities.

Filled with despair at the collapse of the student strike coupled with the extension of citizenship to the Jewish aliens, Codreanu and Ion Mota, a young nationalist from Transylvania, devised the assassination plot which ended in their betrayal and arrest.

At his trial in Bucharest Codreanu took full responsibility for the plan. A botched persecution and the obvious sympathy of the jurors, all native Romanians, won him and his companions acquittal. Only Mota remained in prison: on the first day of the trial he had shot their betrayer in his cell.

Codreanu returned to Jassy and resumed his work of organizing for the National Christian Defense League. Lacking funds, and labor, Codreanu and the Brotherhood of the Cross, as the League's youth wing was known, set to work constructing a clubhouse at Ungheni, several miles from Jassy. The sight of middle-class students hard at work with pick and shovel, something almost unheard of in Romania up to that time, had a great effect on the local villagers. Many of them joined in, and at the same time they began to learn of Codreanu's ideas for the regeneration of Romania.

Codreanu and his supporters were not left in peace for long, however. Three weeks after beginning the construction project at Ungheni, the young men of the Brotherhood were surrounded by policemen, arrested, and hauled off to the Jassy police station. There they were beaten and otherwise abused. Only the intervention of a number of Jassy's leading citizens secured their release.

Codreanu and Professor Cuza appealed to the Minister of the Interior to remove the officer responsible, Police Perfect Manciu. Manciu was not even reprimanded' instead, he was decorated and promoted. The Jews of Jassy showed their appreciation by buying

him a car.

Several months later, on October 25, 1925, Manciu again encountered Codreanu, this time at the courthouse, where Codreanu was preparing to defend a student who had been arrested in the police raid on the Ungheni site. Surrounded by a phalanx of gendarmes, Manciu lunged at Codreanu. This time Codreanu refused to be humiliated. He drew his revolver and he shot the police perfect dead.

Codreanu was tried at Tunul Severin, in the extreme southwest of Romania, as far as possible from Moldavia, where sympathies ran strongly in Codreanu's favor. Nevertheless, the court, meeting in a large theater, was packed with thousands of Codreanu's supporters. Leading Romanians testified on Codreanu's behalf, while the state's witnesses stammered out unconvincing denials of Manciu's brutality. After deliberating for 25 minutes, the jurors proclaimed Codreanu innocent.

Codreanu restricted his political activity for the next year or so. Shortly after the Manciu trial he married Elena Ilinoiu. He and his bride then traveled to France, where Codreanu resumed his studies at the University of Grenoble and earned his doctorate in political economy.

In May 1927 Codreanu returned to Romania. The League of Christian National Defense had split into two factions, and Professor Cuza had summarily banished his opponents from the League.

A rift had been growing between Codreanu and Cuza for some time. Cuza was essentially a conservative, and despite his doctrinaire anti-Semitism he had revealed himself more than once as willing to cooperate with the established political parties. The League also suffered from his lack of organizational ability.

Codreanu and several steadfast friends took their leave of

Professor Cuza and the League of Christian National Defense. On June 24, 1927, at a small gathering in his Jassy apartment, Codreanu proclaimed a new movement: The Legion of Micheal the Archangel.

The Legion had no party program. As Codreanu wrote, "This country is dying of lack of men, not lack of programs... That, in other words, it is not programs that we must have, but men, new men. For such as people are today, formed by politicians and infected by the Judaic influence, they will compromise the most brilliant political programs."

Codreanu envisioned the Legion as the school for the creation of these new men, a new Romanian aristocracy, a generation of heroes. The men of the Legion were to be animated by love of God and country, mutual loyalty, and a joyous acceptance of duty and sacrifice.

Thus, Codreanu recognized that a spiritual revolution was the precondition for a political revolution, if it was to create anything of lasting value.

Without a strong organizational structure, the aims of the Legion would have remained platitudes. Here, as well, Codreanu showed his genius. He organized the Legion on hierarchical lines. At each level, from the basic unit, the nest, up through town, city, county, and regional groups to the Captain, as Codreanu came to be called, the leader validated himself not through election but by ability and courage.

The fundamental Legionary unit, the nest, numbered from three to thirteen members. It comprised of men who already felt the same way, but who had to be taught the discipline of acting for a common purpose. To that end the men of the nest marched and sang together, distributed propaganda, and conducted weekly meetings. Just as important, they helped the impoverished peasants by numerous voluntary labor projects.

The Legion grew slowly. Codreanu was resolutely opposed to any large-scale recruitment which might endanger the Legion's high standards. The university students tended at first to remain in the more established nationalist groups. The Legion was more successful initially in enlisting high school students and those attending commercial and technical institutes.

The nests were painstakingly established and made self-sufficient. At first in Moldavia and Bucovina, and then in Transylvania and Wallachia, the Legion gained strength. Soon Codreanu was in a position to reach out to the forgotten men and women of Romania: the peasants.

No one in the country had suffered at the hands of the system and the system's Jewish masters. Despite a sweeping program of land reform after the war, the peasants lacked tools, animals, and other necessary capital. Forced to borrow money to survive, they were gouged with frightful rates of interest by Jewish moneylenders. Jewish lumber companies stripped the hillsides of the forests which the peasants once held in common, and Jewish speculators gobbled up their land if their luck faltered. Malnutrition and disease were widespread. If there was some consolation to be found in the tavern, it was diminished by the fact that there, too, the owner was almost always a Jew.

At first the peasants were suspicious of the Legion. They had been disappointed many times since the war. The regime of General Acerescu, which the peasants had initially supported with the greatest enthusiasm proved no different from those of the other politicians. Similarly, the Peasant Party's policies, in practice, were identical with those of the laissez-faire Liberals. The politicians showed their solicitude for the peasants' plight only at election time, when they would arrive in the villages in their limousines, make flowery speeches filled with nebulous promises, and then roar off.

Codreanu and his Legionaries quickly dispelled the doubts of the rural folk. They made no promises, nor did they ask for support. Instead, marching or riding on horseback into the villages, singing the songs of Romania's heroic past, they established their kinship with the impoverished farmers by pitching in and helping wherever they were needed. The nests dug ditches, mended fences, repaired houses, and helped with the harvest. The green-shirted Legionaries spoke of a coming Romania, where everyone would have his place, not according to wealth or his learning, but according to his character and his faith.

By 1931 the Legionary Movement was strong enough to contest the elections. In his electoral manifesto Codreanu summed up the plight of the nation: "Nobody who has eyes can fail to see that this rich country has become a ruin. The peasant's household and land, the village-a handful of miserable people, who lament-the county, the region, the barren mountains, the uncultivated plains which no longer produce anything for the poor, unfortunate peasant-all are in ruins. The State budget and the entire country are a shambles.

"And above these ruins scattered all over the Romanian land, a band of dishonorable men, of imbeciles and shameless brigands, have built palaces defying the country, which writhes in pain, and ridiculing your suffering, poor, miserable, Romanian Peasant!"

"A more revolting, painful, and indecent scene has never been witnessed by anyone elsewhere in the world. Millions of households are being destroyed, crushing underneath their ruins countless God-forsaken people who have nothing else left but tears. To top this shame, the palaces of the rascals, who plundered the land and emptied the treasury of our country, rise in a supreme irony and mockery."

The election was not a success. The governing parties did everything in their power to destroy the Legion and its companion movement, the Iron Guard, which had been established as the militant wing of the Legion the previous year. In January 1931 the

government banned the Legion and the Guard after a nationalist student, unaffiliated with the Legion, had attempted to assassinate a cabinet minister. Although the courts vindicated Codreanu and his movement, the Legion's election campaign was effectively stifled, and no Legionaries were elected to the assembly.

The Jews and their Romanian henchmen were unable to contain the growth of the Legion's popularity for long. Both Codreanu and his father were victorious in by-elections held in Moldavia in 1932, and the Legion entered the National Assembly.

As support for the Legionary Movement increased, its Jewish opponents grew less cautious about violating the niceties of the democratic process, to which Codreanu allegedly posed such a threat. As historian Eugen Weber, hardly sympathetic to the Legion, wrote of the Jew-dominated Romanian establishment: "To any real threat against the established order, its beneficiaries reached by all the means at their command, however violent, however illegal: army, police, gendarmerie, the courts-both military and civil, the administrative apparatus with all its possibilities of intimidation and chicanery, were mobilized against those who challenged the system."

In 1933, the Liberal government of Ion Duca, egged on by his foreign minister, Nicolae Titulescu, one of Jewry's chief agents in Romania, banned the Legion once more. The inevitable mass arrests followed: Legionaries by the thousands were imprisoned in concentration camps. There were still men of honor in the Romanian judiciary, however. Only Duca's executioners were convicted; Codreanu and his Legionaries were found innocent.

For the next three years the Legionary movement built up its strength and prestige. Codreanu organized a workers' corps in the cities which eventually grew to over 13,000 members. The Legionaries maintained ties with other European nationalist movements. A Legionary contingent fought Bolshevism in Spain. (Ion Mota, Codreanu's right-hand man, fell there.)

In the December 1937 elections the Legion's electoral front, All for the Fatherland, became the third strongest party in the land. The Legionary success, coupled with the heavy losses suffered by the establishment parties, seemed to raise the possibility of a coalition government dominated by Codreanu.

One man stood in his way: King Carol II, who was empowered by the constitution to confirm or reject ministerial governments proposed by the National Assembly. Carol was a man of authoritarian leanings but weak character. His extra-marital affair with Jewess, Magda Lupescu (nee Wolff), as well as his extravagance and greed, had resulted in his father, King Ferdinand, disinheriting him. After Ferdinand's death, Carol had returned to Romania from France in 1930. With the approbation of the ruling parties, he dethroned his son Michael and set himself up as King Carol II, with Madga Lupescu as his consort. Now the Jews of Romania pinned their hopes on Carol's cupidity and vanity and on the hold which his Jewish mistress had over the weak-willed monarch.

Prompted by his alien advisors, Carol moved adroitly and treacherously. He refused to confirm any government including the Legion. After authorizing a weak rightist party to form a caretaker government, King Carol seized power for himself and his Jewish masters in February 1938. A puppet government ostensibly headed by the Orthodox Patriarch of Bucharest was set up. The driving force in the administration was the Minister of Justice, the ruthless Armand Calinescu.

Calinescu immediately ordered the roundup of the Legionaries. Despite Codreanu's disbanding of his movement's political arm and his steadfast refusal to take violent action against the unlawful regime, he was arrested, tried, and convicted of conspiracy against the state in a rigged trial held before a military court. He was sentenced to ten years confinement at hard labor.

Despite Codreanu's imprisonment, his enormous moral authority continued to inspire the outlawed and hunted Legionaries. The Jews cried out for his blood. Magda Lupescu, like a modern-day Esther, pleaded with her lover to have him killed.

On November 29, 1938, in the dead of night, Codreanu and 13 of his fellow Legionaries were removed from their cells in the prison at Ramnicul-Sarat. From there they were trucked into a forest. Then, hands bound behind their backs, they were strangled in accord with the Talmudic ritual. After they were dead, their killers shot them in the back of the head. The story was put out that they tried to escape.

Codreanu's murderers had little time to savor their triumph. Within two years, Calinescu was dead, assassinated by the Legionaries, and King Carol, whose vacillating foreign policy had resulted the dismemberment of Romania at the hands of Russia, Hungary, and Bulgaria, had been forced to abdicate. He and Magda Lupescu departed Romania forever.

King Carol's regime was followed by a short-lived Legionary government. The social activism and revolutionary idealism of the Legion, however, rendered it unpalatable to the strong man of the regime, Marshal Ion Antonescu, who was only nominally a member of the Legion. Antonescu, in firm command of the army, was able to suppress the Legion in February 1941.

The overthrow of the Legionary government was far from marking the end of the Legion. Individual Legionaries fought with selfless heroism in the defense of Romania against the conquering hordes from the East. After Antonescu's regime capitulated to the Russians, the men of the Legion fought on as long as they were able. The puppet regime which the Soviets brought to power after the war (headed by the Jewess Ana Pauker) hunted down, tortured and killed members of the Legion with a sadistic zeal.

The Legion lives on, however, and with it lives Corneliu

Codreanu. Legionaries in exile, all over the world, keep alive and propagate the Captain's ideas through a tireless work of translation and publishing. It can be justly said that the memory of none of the heroic leaders of the revolution which swept Europe in the 1920's, '30's, and '40's has been better served by his followers than that of Codreanu.



A WORD FOR MY LEGIONARIES

(Speech delivered on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the founding of The Legion of Michael the Archangel)



Dear Comrads,

After fifteen years of struggle, persecution and lives sacrificed, the youth of Romania must know that the time of legionary victory is at hand.

All the enemy's attempts against us will be crushed; all plans to tempt us, all endeavors to buy our souls, all endeavors to divide us, as well as any betrayals among ourselves, all will fall to the ground.

Look them right in the eye - all your tyrants! Endure with resignation all blows, support any torture, for the sacrifice of all of us will be the foundation of iron, of broken bodies, and of tortured souls for victory.

Those from among us who will fall, will have heroes' names and graves! While those who will kill us, will carry the stigma of traitor and will be accused from generation to generation.

From the depths the legionary emerges victorious! With his soul of rock. Those believing they can defeat him as well as those who think they can buy him, will be convinced soon - but too late - that they were mistaken.

From: <http://codreanu.ro/>